

Living the fishing

The following is the preface to *A Livelihood from Fishing: Globalization and Sustainable Fisheries Policies* by Alain Le Sann

The period of the last five decades has been characterized by staggering technological and social progress for mankind. Nonetheless, the irrefutable fact is that the world is in a sorry state. Human misery and hunger, which should have been abolished in this modern era of medical advancement, have only spread to affect more and more of the world's populations.

It is in this context that the issue of how oceans ought to feature as a source of food for mankind assumes importance. Will mankind be looking seawards to solve the food security problems of the 21st Century? The question is particularly relevant since nutritional needs are set to grow along with the world population, which is estimated to be six billion in 2000, and predicted to pass nine billion in 2050.

Furthermore, agricultural production will almost certainly reach a plateau or even decline, as a result of deterioration of the soil and continuing deforestation all around the world.

There is an enormous discrepancy between the North and the South in the consumption of seafood—27 kg per person per year in the North, compared to 9 kg per person per year in the South. This cannot be explained solely by the superior biological fertility of coastal waters off the developed countries. The discrepancy, as the authors of this book argue, is, above all, due to the fact that the underdevelopment and indebtedness of Southern countries oblige them to forego part of their own fish supply.

While, overall, production from fisheries and aquaculture has grown enormously over recent years in the South, the produce has increasingly been exported to earn foreign currency. The net result is that supplies have gone to the more industrialized regions of the world, where demand is continually on the rise. They have not gone to serve the nutritional needs of local populations. In other words, ocean resources are benefiting populations which already enjoy high levels of food intake, rather than those, which are short of protein.

Simultaneously, another anomaly can be observed the mismanagement of fisheries resources, including fish, molluscs and shellfish, whose nutritional value is unanimously acknowledged. It is an unpalatable and immoral fact that a third of all fish catches (about 30 million

tonnes) is destined not to feed humans, but to fatten livestock (poultry, cattle, pigs, salmon, shrimps, and so on). Not only is this utterly wasteful, it is biologically nonsensical.

Absurd practices

Similarly absurd is the fact that tens of millions of tonnes of fish and other marine animals are thrown back into the sea from fishing vessels just because nothing has been done to sell them. Hundreds of shrimp trawlers work to supply the dining tables of a few rich countries while, out at sea, other fish (the so-called by-catches) are discarded just a few miles away from the African or Asian coasts. At the same time, nearly one billion men, women and children struggle on in poverty and hunger.

A Livelihood from Fishing

A Livelihood from Fishing: Globalization and Sustainable Fisheries Policies, compiled by Alain Le Sann, is published by Intermediate Technology Publications, the publishing arm of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, UK. It contains an overview of fisheries and describes for the general reader, in an accessible and lucid style, the social and nutritional issues raised by the modernization of fisheries worldwide. It will be of particular interest to all those concerned with the protection of the marine environment and the Plight of workers in the fisheries sector. Copies can be ordered @ £10.29 (inc. p & p) from Intermediate Technology Publications, 103-105 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HH, UK

What about aquaculture, often billed the great hope for aqua-production of the future? This topic is given ample consideration in this book for a very good reason—over the next 20 or 30 years, aquaculture production is predicted to grow to the same level as current production from capture fisheries. Can aquaculture really provide an alternative to wild, capture fishery? We believe that it can, but only if due respect is paid to nature and to the environment. Ominously enough, spurred by speculative interests, most intensive aquaculture units are concentrating on high-value species, such as salmon and shrimps, rather than on producing food to supply those in need. These units simultaneously pose a threat to the biological fertility and quality of the neighbouring environment and coastal waters.


The only sensible way forward is through extensive or perhaps semi-extensive aquaculture, i.e. only systems sensitive to fragile ecosystems. A reduction of investment at all levels is required. Its socioeconomic viability has been clearly demonstrated by China, where, for centuries, the culture of freshwater fish has been successfully integrated into agricultural systems in combination with, for example, pig rearing or rice cultivation.

Ultimately, effective management of the oceans' resources will depend on our ability to organize its exploitation for the

interests and benefit of each and every stakeholder. Classical fishing development strategies, conceived by research bodies and implemented by governments, rarely achieve the objectives. The harsh reality of competition and the yearning for quick, short-term gains inevitably make us continue to behave as though fish stocks and ocean resources are inexhaustible. With advanced methods of capture, mankind has become an even more formidable predator. Our assaults on the hydrosphere have become veritable raids on the world's precious fish stocks. No wonder our seas are overfished—this is the logical outcome of a system which drives shipowners to intensify their fishing effort and to extend their areas of operation without any regard for the medium - or long-term effects on the marine ecosystem.

Clearly, as the authors of this book exhort, codes of good practice which will help define responsible fishing techniques and processes are long overdue. Without such codes, we will continue to endanger our own prospects for survival. Substitute selfishness with solidarity, and short-term carelessness with thoughtful deliberation—that should be the message for the 21st Century.

Highly accessible

Happily, it is precisely such a message that this book conveys. Designed to unveil the issues in an accessible manner, it draws upon numerous examples to try to answer some of the vexatious questions plaguing the world's fisheries. The oceans and their marine wealth comprise a vulnerable living resource which, as this book powerfully argues, needs to be protected from wastage and greed. 

This preface to *A Livelihood from Fishing* was written by Jean Chaussade, Director of Research, CNRS, University of Nantes